An Essay on Natural Labor

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by

William Irwin Church

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Natural Labor

In selecting labor, as the subject for my Thesis, I am well aware of the fact, that the ground has been gone over time and again, and that little, if anything, remains, which has not been minutely described. I might then follow in the well beaten path, and enter into a minute description of the anatomy of the pelvis, its different diameters, planes, and axes; describe the diameters of the foetal head, their relation to the diameters of the pelvis, the precursory symptoms that set in, the subdivision of these symptoms into five principal classes, give their names, describe those that indicate the near approach or actual commencement of labor itself; speak of the false and true labor pains, the division of the true into the cutting or dilating pains, and bearing down or expulsive pains; the sickness of the stomach, cramps, and convulsions, that are often the attendants

upon labor, and finally, I might describe the three divisions into which by common consent labor is divided, and consider the commencement, duration, and termination of each of these stages, but I will not occupy either your time or my own, any further than by a brief review of the subject.

Of all the various duties the Physician is called upon to perform, none offer a wider range for close study, and absorbing interest, than the attentions required by the parturient woman. Notice the beautiful harmony with which Nature governs the entire process, commencing with the cutting or dilating pains, which assisted by the bag of waters acting the part of a wedge, bring about the dilatation of the os uteri; the escape of these waters after they have performed their mechanical office, causing to some extent by their flow, that degree of moisture, and softness, so necessary to the vagina and

external organs of generation, and permitting the uterus by its now diminished bulk, to contract with greater force, and bring on — as the first obstruction to the passage of the child has been removed — the second stage of labor.

Notice again, when the second stage of labor has set in, when the passage of the child from its dark abode in the uterus has commenced, and its intra-uterine life of nine months, or two hundred and seventy, or two hundred and eighty days, has ended; when it is prepared by the growth and developement of all its parts, and functions, to maintain a separate existence, how the entire system lends its aid to relieve the mother from that which now acts as a foreign substance, and to give birth to the future man.

Notice again in the third place, the relief and rest which Nature affords the system,

exhausted by its mighty efforts, ere she calls upon it to resume its work, expel the placenta, and thus complete the marvelous change.

We find that in all these changes Nature wisely adapts means to ends, and that not until expulsive efforts are required, do we have the bearing down pains setting in; and that as the process goes carefully and steadily forward, we have part after part dilated to the requisite extent, and each softened, and rendered more pliable, by a fluid secreted for this especial purpose.

Let us look for a moment, more particularly at the mechanism of labor. We are astonished at a process so simple, and yet so strange. We find that when flexion first sets in, we have the occipito-mental changed to a shorter the occipito-frontal diameter, and that as flexion increases, this again is changed to a still shorter the

trachelo-bregmatic diameter; thus bringing the long diameter of the childs head, to correspond to the long diameter of the mothers pelvis. Next we have rotation, or the gliding of the childs head over the inclined planes of the pelvis, causing at all times by this movement these relative diameters to be maintained. The next act is extension, or the release of the chin of the child from its breast, after the occiput has escaped under the arch of the pubis; and fourthly, and lastly, we have restitution.

It might not be amiss to notice the difference existing between the male and female pelvis. Here too, we find Nature has not been unmindful of the great work the female is called upon to perform, but has given to her a lighter and more capacious pelvis than to the male. In the male pelvis we find strength and firmness, in the female pelvis we have breadth and capacity,

giving to her form those curved lines of grace and beauty, which sculptors have prized in all ages, and which no true lover of the beautiful can gaze upon unmoved.

The Physician when called to attend a case of labor, should first assure himself that the Presentation and Position are favorable, and then patiently, calmly, and quietly, await the result. To one of even limited experience, the progress of the labor, the rapidity with which it is hastening to its termination, are plainly marked out, and very few examinations per vaginam are required. The change from the dilating to the bearing down pains, cannot escape the observation of one whose duty it is, or whose qualifications entitle him, to a seat at the bedside of woman, in this her hour of greatest need. During the dilating pains, the patient betokens her sufferings

by screams at the commencement, and throughout the continuance of the pain, not so however when the expulsive pains set in; then we find the patient, as soon as she feels the pain commencing, holding her breath, flexing her knees upon her abdomen, pressing firmly with her feet upon the foot of the bed, or something arranged for that purpose; and either grasping tightly the hands of an assistant, or drawing with full force upon a towel, or roller, so arranged as to give the greatest power from the fixture of the diaphragm, and contractions of the muscles of the abdomen, and not until the pain is passing off, does she make an outcry.

"Meddlesome Midwifery is bad", says an old writer, and no truer axiom was ever laid down. Nature unaided, is generally all sufficient to accomplish her work, and too often the Physician by his untimely interference, retards and renders difficult, and

perhaps hazardous, a proces which otherwise would go on regularly and smoothly to completion. Nature does the work; the Doctor receives the credit.

The birth of a child has well been called labor. "In sorrow shalt thou conceive, and bring forth children", was the sentence pronounced upon our Mother Eve, and since the Creation, all her Daughters who have borne children, have inherited this painful legacy. 'Tis true that in different climates, under different States of civilization and culture, the degrees of pain are modified, and strange as it may seem, civilization in this respect has <u>not</u> been an advantage. We are told that among Savages, and the less cultivated Nations, the females bear children with less pain than we find attending ordinary cases in our own Country. This doubtless results from their mode of life. Females in California for instance, adopt a loose costume, are ignorant of corsets, and permit their forms unrestrained

by Fashion or its dictates to grow and develope at will.

So a reflecting mind, the subject of labor is strange and wonderful. Who but He who said, "Let there be light: and there was light", could have thought of, much less brought to pass and perfected, so divine an arrangement? The mind of man is lost in contemplation, and in vain does he with his puny intellect, attempt to solve this great problem of his Maker.

Before taking leave of the subject of labor, let us think for one moment of our Sister woman. Think of the nine months of anxiety, and two often of suffering, that precede the fiery ordeal through which she has to pass; and as we thus see her, more helpless than her Brother man, enduring sufferings and pain, from which he in his all sufficient might and power would turn from in terror, let us learn from this a lesson of patience, and forbearance, and treat with delicacy, tenderness, and care, those whom it may be our lot to attend.